What We Heard
Report 2018

Homelessness Partnering Strategy Engagement

Employment and Social Development Canada
Emploi et Développement social Canada

Canada

Homelessness Partnering Strategy Engagement – What We Heard Report

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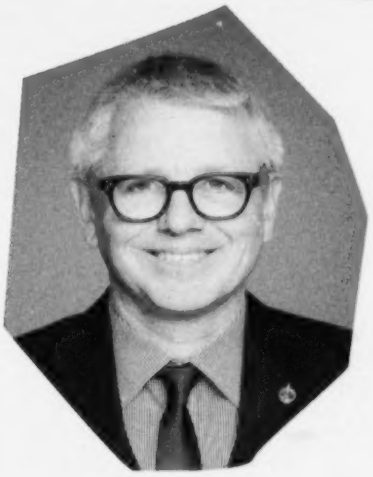
MESSAGE FROM THE PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY



I would first and foremost like to thank the many Canadians from across the country who took time to engage with the Advisory Committee on Homelessness. Whether in person, online, or by mail, your input has been thoughtful, heartfelt and, above all, smart. Of particular note are the contributions from people with lived experience of homelessness. The life lessons acquired through navigating the country's housing system and the resilience you have shown in the face of extraordinary challenges and harrowing circumstances has not stopped you from coming forward to help others. Your contributions will help all of us make a difference.

I would also like to acknowledge the role that Elders from different nations and communities across Canada played throughout our engagement process. At each community meeting, the ceremony and wisdom of Elders helped guide our conversations and ground our work in a positive way. Elders contributed and sat with us as we listened to Canadians on the frontline of homelessness. It was an honour to be guided by all of you on this difficult journey.

It was clear from virtually every community that more must be done, even though good work is being pursued in so many different settings. For example, there are strong programs in Quebec that should and could be shared across Canada such as shelters that provide a range of support services. Even though each community is distinct, there are certain sub-populations of homeless Canadians whose plight were constant across all communities. Young people, and particularly youth aging out of care, are a challenge that we cannot ignore. They represent the most precariously positioned Canadians and if left at risk, they will form the next generation of homeless Canadians sleeping rough on streets or hidden in substandard living conditions. All orders of government have a duty to support our youth.

Indigenous people are significantly over-represented in the homeless population across Canada. At one community roundtable, the Committee heard that Truth and Reconciliation

will never be achieved without a specific Indigenous Housing Strategy. Indigenous homelessness must be addressed through a unique and distinct framework that includes culturally appropriate definitions of homelessness and services.

It was also clear that even though women constitute a small population of those counted as "officially" homeless, women are often the first to lose their housing and last to be rehoused. The challenges women face on the street are significant and must be addressed through gender-specific programming. Homeless women and girls are many of the hidden homeless in Canada.

Our visit to the North and the contribution from frontline workers and people with lived experience of homelessness from the territories was exceptionally important. Homelessness changes as you approach the Arctic. The weather becomes more extreme and so too do the situations facing poorly housed people in the territories. We heard that a distinct approach is needed to address very different issues facing homeless people in the territories.

As we contemplate expanding the federal homelessness program and are advised to find ways to fund new communities, we were told many times that the program must be: more flexible; focus equally on prevention efforts; and focus on providing permanent supportive solutions for people experiencing homelessness. These messages were consistent across communities.

On behalf of the Committee, I would like to thank all of the frontline workers who took time from serving people to contribute to our engagement process. Your work is not taken for granted, never forgotten, and valued. You are doing amazing things and helping people twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. We are grateful for your service and advice.

Finally, I would like to thank all of the Advisory Committee Members for their dedication, commitment, passion for solving homelessness, expertise and wisdom. I would also like to thank the staff at the Homelessness Policy and Partnerships Division for their tireless and professional work in organizing the regional roundtables across the country in a very short time frame and assisting the Advisory Committee with this critical work.

Sincerely,

Adam Vaughan, M.P.
Spadina–Fort York
Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families,
Children and Social Development (Housing and Urban Affairs)

SUMMARY

During the National Housing Strategy consultations in 2016, we received feedback on housing and homelessness. So in 2017, we began asking Canadians about how to redesign the Homelessness Partnering Strategy. We wanted to know what parts of the program were working well and what parts could be improved.

An advisory committee was created to talk with experts, communities, people who have experienced homelessness, Indigenous organizations, and others across the country. The Advisory Committee on Homelessness, chaired by Adam Vaughan, Parliamentary Secretary (Housing and Urban Affairs), held 10 roundtables. We also received over 500 responses online from Canadians and organizations between July 17 and September 15, 2017.

We heard from many people and organizations, and they consistently told us that homelessness is a problem in communities of all sizes across Canada. Their suggestions to address homelessness ranged from increasing support payments and more affordable housing, to ways to improve parts of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy.

There were seven common themes in the suggestions we received. These themes are listed below and are explored in more detail in the report.

Housing First – Canadians suggested ways to improve the Homelessness Partnering Strategy's approach to Housing First. This included expanding the definition of chronic and episodic homelessness so that more of the homeless population qualifies for services and making changes to meet the needs of Indigenous Peoples, women and youth.

Preventing homelessness – Canadians would like more funding for programs and services that are proven to prevent individuals and families from becoming homeless.

Indigenous homelessness – Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and organizations told us more funding is needed for homelessness among First Nation, Inuit and Métis. They also told us to recognize the expertise and knowledge that Indigenous Peoples have in addressing homelessness.

Partnerships and coordination – Communities told us that they would like to see more coordination and a change to a systems approach to address homelessness. The systems approach means different service providers work together to coordinate resources and focus on the goal of ending homelessness. The Government would support the systems approach through investment, training, and technical support.

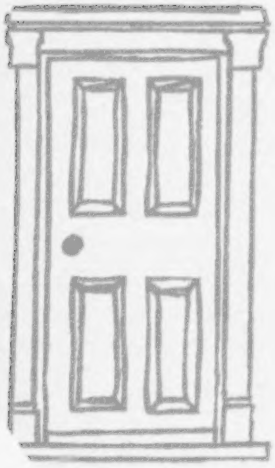
Governance – Organizations that receive funding from the Homelessness Partnering Strategy would like more planning and decision-making at the local level, as well as more diversity in the Community Advisory Boards that help deliver the Strategy.

Organizational capacity and administrative burden – Participants told us that reporting could be made more efficient, which would allow more time to work with clients.

Funding – Organizations told us about ways to improve Homelessness Partnering Strategy funding to communities, including expanding the number of communities that receive funding and allowing funding not used in one year to be carried over to the next year.

The Minister of Families, Children and Social Development has committed to launch an expanded and redesigned federal homelessness program on April 1, 2019. As the new program is developed over the coming months, we will consider the feedback we received as well as factors like fiscal and jurisdictional responsibilities. We value the feedback of Canadians and will continue to seek input on how the federal government can prevent and reduce homelessness.

INTRODUCTION



One of the most important roles of the Government of Canada is to support vulnerable Canadians, including people who are experiencing homelessness or are at risk of becoming homeless. All Canadians need and deserve housing that is safe, adequate and affordable.

Homelessness in Canada

Homelessness affects various Canadians, including individuals and families, women fleeing violence, Indigenous Peoples, youth and seniors. In 2014, 137,000 Canadians used an emergency shelter. Canada has about 15,000 emergency shelters, and the average occupancy rate had risen to over 90 percent, making it likely that shelters have turned people away.[1] As well, approximately 35,000 Canadians experience some form of homelessness on any given night.[2]

The cost of health, social and judicial services for homelessness is high. Some estimate that it costs the Canadian economy as much as $7 billion each year.[3]

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[1] Segaert, A. (2016). *The National Shelter Study 2005-2014*. Employment and Social Development Canada.

[2] Gaetz, S., Dej, E., Richter, T., and Redman, M. (2016). *The State of Homelessness in Canada 2016*. Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.

[3] *ibid*

All governments work with individuals and organizations to prevent and reduce homelessness. The role of Employment and Social Development Canada's Homelessness Partnering Strategy is to:

- Provide leadership by bringing together governments, the not-for-profit and private sectors and people who have experienced homelessness.
- Fund national and community programs.
- Support the collection of data and research to develop evidence-based policies and deliver programs.

An overview of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy

The Homelessness Partnering Strategy aims to prevent and reduce homelessness in Canada. It provides direct financial support to communities across Canada to help them address their local homelessness needs. First launched on April 1, 2007, the Homelessness Partnering Strategy builds on the former National Homelessness Initiative, which was introduced in 1999.

There are six streams of funding for the Strategy. Three of them are regionally delivered: Designated Communities, Aboriginal Homelessness, and Rural and Remote Homelessness. Three are nationally delivered: Innovative Solutions to Homelessness, the National Homelessness Information System and the Surplus Federal Real Property for Homelessness Initiative.

Through the regionally delivered streams, the Homelessness Partnering Strategy provides direct funding to 61 designated communities (urban centres), as well as Indigenous and rural and remote communities across Canada, to support their efforts in preventing and reducing homelessness. After completing a wide-ranging community planning process, communities develop projects that meet their own needs and priorities as well as the objectives of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy.

Each Homelessness Partnering Strategy designated community (outside of the province of Quebec) has a Community Advisory Board that sets the direction for addressing local homelessness issues and recommends projects for funding. The Community Advisory Board is made up of a wide range of stakeholders, including from the municipality, the provincial or territorial government, not-for-profit organizations and for-profit enterprises.

A Community Entity is responsible for implementing a community plan. Usually, it is an incorporated organization such as the community's municipal government or an established not-for-profit organization. The Community Entity administers the Homelessness Partnering Strategy funding to support local organizations, and it monitors and reports on the results of projects.

In some communities, Indigenous Community Advisory Boards set the direction for Aboriginal homelessness funding under the Homelessness Partnering Strategy. As well, Regional Advisory

Boards exist in some places to determine homelessness priorities for Rural and Remote Homelessness funding from the program.

In Quebec, the Homelessness Partnering Strategy is administered through a formal Canada-Quebec agreement that respects the jurisdiction and priorities of both governments in addressing homelessness. Under the agreement, the Quebec Centres intégrés (universitaires) de santé et de services sociaux co-ordinate activities for their region. This includes developing community plans and identifying priorities with the Tables de concertation.

Policy direction: 2014 to 2019

When the Homelessness Partnering Strategy was renewed in 2014, Housing First became a policy priority, with a focus on chronic[4] and episodic[5] homelessness. This change was based mainly on the results of the Mental Health Commission of Canada's At Home/Chez Soi initiative and on early results from other Canadian cities that started using the Housing First model.[6]

Housing First under the Homelessness Partnering Strategy involves moving individuals from the streets or emergency homeless shelters directly into permanent housing. Once in housing, they are linked to services to help keep their housing and reintegrate into the community. The program's Housing First approach is targeted at people who are experiencing chronic or episodic homelessness.

Current context for the Homelessness Partnering Strategy

New investments

Budget 2016 included an additional $111.8 million for the Homelessness Partnering Strategy over two years (2016-17 and 2017-18) to further support communities in their efforts to help Canadians experiencing homelessness find stable housing. This represented the first increase in funding for federal homelessness programming since its inception in 1999. It builds on the program's existing five-year investment of nearly $600 million over five years (2014 to 2019) and maintains a focus on the Housing First approach.

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[4] Chronic homelessness currently refers to people who often have disabling conditions (for example, chronic physical or mental illness, substance abuse problems) and who are homeless and have been homeless for six months or more in the past year (they have spent a total of more than 180 nights in a shelter or place not fit for human living).

[5] Episodic homelessness currently refers to people who often have disabling conditions and who are homeless and have been homeless three or more episodes of homelessness in the past year (episodes are periods when a person would be in a shelter or place not fit for human living and, after at least 30 days, would be back in the shelter or location not fit for human living).

[6] Goering, P., Veldhuizen, S., Watson, A., Adair, C., Kopp, B., Latimer, E., Nelson, G., MacNaughton, E., Streiner, D., Aubry, T. (2014). *National At Home/Chez Soi Final Report*. Calgary: Mental Health Commission of Canada.

Budget 2017 proposed to maintain the program's expanded 2017-18 funding level for 2018-19. Additionally, the National Housing Strategy will invest $2.2 billion over 10 years to tackle homelessness through an expanded federal homelessness program.

With these investments, communities will be better able to address homelessness with the goal of reducing chronic homelessness by half by 2027-28.

The Advisory Committee on Homelessness

After the National Housing Strategy consultations in 2016, the Government committed in Budget 2017 to consult with Canadians on how to redesign the Homelessness Partnering Strategy and to create a panel to give advice to the Honourable Jean-Yves Duclos, Minister of Families, Children and Social Development. On June 22, 2017, the Minister announced the membership of the Advisory Committee on Homelessness. Chaired by Adam Vaughan, Parliamentary Secretary (Housing and Urban Affairs) to Minister Duclos, the Advisory Committee on Homelessness had 13 members from outside of government and from across the country that represented diverse regions and cultures, Canada's two official languages, as well as people who have experienced homelessness.

The focus of the Advisory Committee's work was to provide Employment and Social Development Canada with potential ways forward for the redesign of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy. The Committee had a mandate to:

- Explore the ideas heard through the National Housing Strategy engagement process in greater depth.
- Undertake targeted engagement with experts, communities, and stakeholders.
- Analyze options for the renewal of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy.

Homelessness Partnering Strategy engagement overview

Various activities were used to reach Canadians throughout the engagement process on redesigning the Homelessness Partnering Strategy in 2017. We wanted to make sure we heard from people with a range of experience from across the country. This included in-person roundtables and online engagement. During these activities, we made sure to consult with people who have experienced homelessness.

In-person roundtables

The Advisory Committee on Homelessness hosted roundtable discussions across Canada. Regional roundtables were held in eight cities: Halifax, Toronto, Winnipeg, Vancouver, Yellowknife, Montréal, Québec and Calgary. For each of these roundtables, a local Indigenous elder was present to start the proceedings and take part in the discussion.

Roundtable participants included representatives from homeless-serving organizations from the city and surrounding area, people with lived experience of homelessness, and representatives from Indigenous organizations. The Chair of the Committee hosted each roundtable, and some committee members attended each one. The regional roundtables asked for input on what was working with the program and what was not, as well as suggestions for improvement.

Two other roundtables were held: one with Community Entities and Community Advisory Boards, and another focused on veterans' homelessness. The Community Entity/Community Advisory Board session had about 80 participants from across the country. Participants shared their ideas on the tools and approaches needed to make progress in reducing chronic homelessness, as well as ways that the Homelessness Partnering Strategy could support community efforts to improve local coordination and decision-making. The roundtable on veterans' homelessness brought together organizations and experts who work with homeless veterans and veteran-serving organizations from across the country. This roundtable expanded the conversation about how to prevent and reduce veterans' homelessness.

When the Committee Chair and members visited cities for roundtables, they visited local service providers to learn more about the work being done, and to discuss challenges and opportunities with the Homelessness Partnering Strategy.

Online engagement

Employment and Social Development Canada launched an online feedback process open to all Canadians on July 17, 2017. This process included quick polls and surveys and was open until September 15, 2017.

Almost 500 surveys were submitted from individuals and organizations from most provinces and territories, across all age groups (18 years of age or older) and with various backgrounds and perspectives on how to address homelessness.

As well, 678 people from across the country and representing all age groups answered online quick polls with their opinions on the extent of homelessness in their community or across Canada. For both the community and national polls, almost all people indicated that homelessness was an issue to some extent. At the community level, 74 percent felt it was an issue to a large extent, 20 percent felt it was an issue to a medium extent and 6 percent felt it was an issue to a small extent.

In addition to the online surveys, some organizations and individuals shared their feedback through electronic submissions. These included emails with program ideas, as well as in-depth analysis and reports on homelessness and recommendations for the Homelessness Partnering Strategy. Some organizations also shared promising practices to address homelessness at the community level that could be applied across the country.

Other discussions on expanding and redesigning the Homelessness Partnering Strategy

From August to December 2017, departmental officials held meetings with provincial and territorial officials to get input on the program and ways to improve coordination between the two governments.

In 2017, departmental officials also began discussions with Indigenous partners, including Indigenous service providers and local organizations, to explore new ways to collaborate in addressing Indigenous homelessness to better meet the needs of First Nation, Inuit, and Métis individuals.

Other Government of Canada consultations

Two other consultation processes provided input for redesigning the Homelessness Partnering Strategy: the National Housing Strategy and the Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy. A report called *Let's Talk Housing* was released in November 2016 with the findings of the National Housing Strategy consultation. This was followed by the final National Housing Strategy in November 2017, which is based on all of the input and feedback received. In February 2018, a report called *Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy—What we heard about poverty so far* was released.

WHAT WE HEARD

Throughout the Homelessness Partnering Strategy engagement process, Canadians told us that homelessness is a problem in communities of all sizes across Canada. Suggestions to address homelessness ranged from higher support payments and more affordable housing to improving parts of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy.

Survey respondents, including people who identify as having experienced homelessness, and roundtable participants, gave feedback similar to what we heard in other consultations, including:

- The Government of Canada should play an active role in creating increased affordable, safe and accessible housing; this includes housing options such as social housing and cooperative housing;
- Increase the availability of temporary housing options such as emergency shelters and transitional housing;
- Improve financial supports to individuals, such as by increasing social assistance, other income supports and minimum wage, or by providing minimum levels of income (for example, a living wage);
- Increase support for, and access to, mental health and addiction services, including harm reduction services; and
- Increase the availability of social supports, including counselling, community integration and job training for people experiencing homelessness and those at risk of homelessness.

People who have experienced homelessness talked about their experiences, including how hard it is to find adequate, affordable and safe housing and services. People from the North and rural and remote communities reminded everyone that housing and homelessness issues can be different for them, including a lack of services to help them transition to permanent housing.

Improving the Homelessness Partnering Strategy

These are the common themes we heard from Canadians on how to improve the Homelessness Partnering Strategy:

Housing First

We heard that there is growing support for Housing First in communities across Canada. Many participants told us that they were not sure about the impact of the shift to Housing First when the Government first announced it. But evidence is now showing this approach does work to help people move from the streets and emergency shelters into permanent housing. It also supports them to have stable, long-term housing and to improve their quality of life.

Housing First targets

Some communities felt the priority for Housing First should be individuals who are experiencing chronic or episodic homelessness. Others felt that targeting the program's investments at only certain parts of the homeless population would make it harder for other groups that need access to housing and services.

We heard that the program's Housing First funding targets make it more difficult for communities to address the full range of local needs. A number of stakeholders felt that funding decisions should be left to communities and their local planning and priority-setting. There is general support for Housing First across the country, but some participants would like Homelessness Partnering Strategy funding to support different approaches that meet various needs in their communities. As well, many communities would like to invest more Homelessness Partnering Strategy funding in programs other than Housing First, including rapid re-housing and preventing homelessness.

Definition of chronic and episodic homelessness

Participants supported targeting funds to people in greatest need. But we also heard that making chronic and episodic homelessness the priority for Housing First means that some other people do not qualify for services.

There were questions about whether or not the program's current definition of chronic or episodic homelessness includes people who have stayed in emergency shelters or that local service providers do not know about (for example, people who "couch-surf" or stay temporarily with family members or friends). There was also concern that the current definition does not

address the growing challenge of youth homelessness, in particular young people coming from the child welfare system.

We heard that requiring chronic or episodic homelessness to qualify for Housing First is not fair and is against the spirit of the right to housing for all Canadians.

We consistently heard that the following should be considered to redesign the Homelessness Partnering Strategy:

- Expand the definition of chronic and episodic homelessness so service providers can help a larger and more diverse part of the local homeless population with a Housing First approach;
- Include how severe the need is in addition to the length of homelessness to help communities set priorities for Housing First interventions; and
- Use the same definition as provincial/territorial homelessness programs, where they exist.

Adaptations to Housing First

Participants agreed that Housing First should not be used as a "one size fits all" approach under the Homelessness Partnering Strategy. We heard that organizations would like to be able to innovate and adapt the Housing First model to better meet the needs of Indigenous people, youth, women (including women fleeing violence) and other people who need different approaches or types and levels of support.

They asked for more research and investment to develop Housing First programs that are appropriate to Indigenous culture, including different housing models, programs and services that work with Indigenous cultural values and languages, and meet the needs of Indigenous people. Many also asked that the Homelessness Partnering Strategy focus more on youth (including LGBTQ2 and minority youth), since they face unique risks and are particularly vulnerable. They proposed that Housing First programs for youth could work with schools to identify young people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness, help young people coming from provincial child welfare systems and help young people reconnect with family and other natural supports (for example, close family friends).

We also heard that communities want to adapt the Housing First model to local conditions, especially in smaller (including rural and remote) communities with limited housing, supports and services.

The need for housing

A common issue raised is that the success of Housing First programs relies heavily on housing being available. There is a limited supply of affordable and supportive housing, and there are often long waiting lists for subsidized units. This has led to a "scattered site" approach in many communities, where Housing First clients are placed in rental units in the private housing market with rent supplements so they can afford them.

We were told that there are not enough rental units and rent supplements funded through provincial and territorial governments. The Homelessness Partnering Strategy provides funding for rent supplements for Housing First clients under its Emergency Housing Fund, but these are short-term subsidies to give service providers time to move clients to provincial/territorial rent supplement programs. We have heard from communities that the limited supply of housing and rent subsidies really limit the number of Housing First clients that service providers can house.

We heard from service providers and people who are experiencing homelessness or are at risk of homelessness that the lack of affordable, supportive and other shared/community living housing (including culturally appropriate housing models) reduces "housing choice" for Housing First clients. This could be a real barrier for youth, women (including women fleeing violence) and Indigenous people, who may prefer community living for safety reasons or for social, cultural and spiritual reasons.

The need for supports

Many Housing First clients have complex mental health and addiction issues, and they need a lot of support to live in stable housing. Communities and local service providers told us they need more clinical supports and the lack of Homelessness Partnering Strategy funding for these types of supports is a serious barrier to making Housing First work. The Homelessness Partnering Strategy funds Intensive Case Management[7] for clients with moderate needs, but the types of services required for clients with greater needs (for example, physicians, nurses, psychiatrists) delivered by Assertive Community Treatment[8] teams are delivered by provincial and territorial governments. Where these services are not available, or in short supply, Housing First clients with high levels of need may not receive enough support to stay in stable housing.

We also heard from local service providers and people who are or have experienced homelessness that federal funding should be available so that organizations can hire and train peer support workers. These workers are people who have experienced homelessness and who work with front-line staff to help people who are experiencing homelessness or are at risk of homelessness to access services, housing and supports.

[7] In Intensive Case Management, case workers work alone or in teams to connect people with housing and clinical and other supports. The type and level of support offered is geared to people with moderately severe needs.

[8] Assertive Community Treatment involves added clinical supports, such as a psychiatrist, doctor, nurse and substance abuse specialists on a single team, and that team serves all of the person's needs. The type and depth of support offered is geared to individuals with the highest needs.

Preventing homelessness

Although participants consider the shift to Housing First an important step forward in addressing homelessness in Canada, many told us that they want the Government of Canada to put more funding into programs and services that are proven to prevent individuals and families from becoming homeless in the first place (for example, eviction prevention and rapid re-housing with supports).

Finally, many communities said that they would like to see more investment to prevent youth homelessness. In particular, they identified the need for federal and provincial and territorial governments to work together more closely to make sure housing and supports are available to young people leaving the child welfare system.

Indigenous homelessness

Many Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and organizations told us more funding and a greater understanding of Indigenous homelessness are needed. Indigenous organizations said they would like to see the principles of reconciliation built into the Homelessness Partnering Strategy, as well as services that recognize Indigenous knowledge and deal with intergenerational trauma that affects many Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous organizations would like to see the Homelessness Partnering Strategy's Housing First eligibility criteria expanded (to serve a larger share of the homeless population). They would also like to adapt the Housing First model so it is appropriate to Indigenous cultural and spiritual values and their unique housing and support needs.

Partnerships and coordination

We heard that the shift to Housing First has helped build and strengthen community partnerships that move individuals from the streets or emergency shelters into permanent housing. For example, partnerships with landlords can ensure more successful tenancies for Housing First clients.

Based on feedback from communities across Canada, we know there are opportunities to advance Housing First through greater coordination. Communities would like:

- to expand the new web-based **Homelessness Individuals and Families Information System** (HIFIS 4)[9] to all communities supported by the Homelessness Partnering Strategy to improve collaboration and coordination of data;
- a shift to a systems approach to addressing homelessness. This could include support for system mapping so communities better understand the range of programs and services available and identify gaps and duplication, how and where services overlap and fit together, and whether organizations across the service system share the same goals and objectives; and

[9] The Homelessness Individuals and Families Information System is software that helps communities and organizations that support people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. It helps to manage the entire range of support services for these people, and it allows organizations and communities to collect and analyze data on homelessness.

- investment, training and technical support for communities to build coordinated access and assessment[10] processes to assess a person's situation and the severity of their needs, and to match them with appropriate housing and services. Participants told us that coordinated access and assessment is essential for an integrated system of care.

Canadians also told us that addressing homelessness requires more coordination and alignment between all governments, and across federal government departments that have an impact on homelessness. Among the most common recommendations, we heard:

- Better coordination of federal and provincial/territorial homelessness programs would decrease the administrative burden on communities and improve outcomes for vulnerable people; and
- Communities would like the Government of Canada to develop ways to coordinate with provincial/territorial public systems (for example, child welfare, health, corrections).

Homelessness Partnering Strategy governance

We heard strong support for the Homelessness Partnering Strategy's community-based model. However, communities identified issues about the roles of Community Entities and Community Advisory Boards to strengthen planning and decision-making at the local level.

Community Entities and Community Advisory Boards

Some communities have strong local leadership and their Community Advisory Boards work well, but this differs across Canada. The Homelessness Partnering Strategy's guidance on "conflict of interest" could be clearer, particularly for Community Advisory Boards that include service providers who benefit from funding decisions.

The need for more diverse representation, especially from Indigenous service providers, on Community Advisory Boards and Regional Advisory Boards was also raised. More resources may be needed to enable Indigenous organizations to participate in local planning and decision-making.

In communities with a large Indigenous population, we heard that the Homelessness Partnering Strategy should encourage the creation of Indigenous Community Entities and Community Advisory Boards if there is strong interest on the part of local Indigenous organizations. Investment and training to strengthen local organizations might be needed. In communities with Indigenous Community Entities and Community Advisory Boards in place, ways to encourage more collaboration with designated Community Entities and Community Advisory Boards could be considered, while acknowledging and respecting the unique role and special work of Indigenous Community Entities and Community Advisory Boards.

[10] Coordinated access and assessment represents a single place or process for people experiencing homelessness to access housing and support services. A common assessment tool is used to determine their level of need, and they are then matched to the housing and services best for them. Coordinated access and assessment is designed to meet the needs of the most vulnerable first and is more efficient by helping people move through the system faster, preventing new cases of homelessness, and improving data collection and quality to provide accurate information on client needs.

Having people who have experienced homelessness on Community Advisory Boards and other planning and decision-making bodies was also identified as something important to consider. We heard from service providers and people who have experienced homelessness that they bring a unique perspective on how to design and deliver programs and services.

Community planning

Throughout the engagement process, we heard that the Homelessness Partnering Strategy community plan could be more effective in driving local action on homelessness. Many said that the current community plan is considered a standard service delivery plan for Homelessness Partnering Strategy funding. We heard that communities often have several plans and processes to meet the requirements of different funders, and they all involve in-depth consultations with the same local stakeholders, which leads to duplication, confusion and administrative burden.

Here are some of the ideas to strengthen local community planning:

- Replace the current Homelessness Partnering Strategy plan with "system plans" that are developed in close consultation with community stakeholders and include clear targets to reduce and prevent homelessness. Performance should be measured to keep track of outcomes over time;
- Support and invest in reducing and preventing homelessness for specific groups of people, including young people and Indigenous people; and
- Create ways to include people with lived experience of homelessness in community planning, monitoring and evaluation.

Organizational capacity and administrative burden

Service providers told us that they have small budgets and limited staff. Short periods of funding, often from several funders, make it difficult to hire and keep qualified staff. This also limits how much personal training they can offer and their capacity to deliver services quickly in challenging situations.

We were told that organizations need federal investments over a longer period of time so they can build their capacity. The Training and Technical Assistance program for Housing First, which is funded by the Homelessness Partnering Strategy and implemented by the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, was an example of the kind of initiative that could be expanded.

Others told us that capacity building will be needed to help communities create and manage local coordinated access and assessment processes. In several communities, we heard that organizations look forward to broader use of the Homelessness Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS 4) to help communities make the shift to a systems approach to homelessness.

Finally, there was a lot of feedback from Community Entities and service providers on the Homelessness Partnering Strategy's administrative and reporting requirements. We heard that the administrative work required, especially in terms of reporting results, is time-consuming and a real burden. They need to report to several different funders (including provincial/territorial governments) with different performance measures and reporting requirements.

We heard that redesigning the Homelessness Partnering Strategy is an opportunity to simplify its administration. Most would like to see the Government focus on a smaller number of clear outcomes (rather than "results") and work with provincial and territorial governments to simplify planning and reporting.

Homelessness Partnering Strategy funding

The new federal investment announced in Budget 2016 and the Government of Canada's commitment under the National Housing Strategy to expand and extend funding for the Homelessness Partnering Strategy for 10 years through Budget 2017 has been positively received by communities and others across Canada. We heard that this added longer-term funding will help stabilize local organizations and the programs and services they deliver, and also allow them to plan more strategically. A number of ways were suggested to improve funding for communities:

- Create new designated communities where they are needed and give more funding to existing designated communities where homelessness is most severe. At the very least, communities would like current funding levels to be maintained;
- Allow communities to carry over unused funding from one year to the next. We were told that being able to carry over funds is essential for communities to be able to manage project delays, meet new needs in the community and fund long-term initiatives, including system planning[11] work;
- Allow Homelessness Partnering Strategy funding to be "stacked" with other federal programs, and work to allow this with provincial and territorial governments as well; and
- Consider specific funding for vulnerable populations such as young people.

[11] In a Housing First context, system planning is a way of organizing and delivering housing, supports and other programs and services locally. In place of an "organization-by-organization" or "program-by-program" approach, system planning helps communities to coordinate and align all programs and services across the system (for example, street outreach, emergency shelters, health and social services, housing, etc.).

NEXT STEPS

We heard from people across the country who have different experiences and views on homelessness, including from people who have experienced homelessness. As the new program is developed, we will continue to balance what we heard with factors like financial and jurisdictional issues, as well as where the Government of Canada can make the biggest difference.

The Minister of Families, Children and Social Development has committed to launch an expanded and redesigned federal homelessness program on April 1, 2019.

We value the input we have received, and we will continue to seek feedback on the role of the federal government in preventing and addressing homelessness. We will also continue to talk with our provincial, territorial and Indigenous partners and look for opportunities to continue the discussion with Canadians. Please let us know what you think about this report by **tweeting at us** or by sending us an **email**.

APPENDIX – ONLINE FEEDBACK

Online feedback activity	Number of responses
Homelessness Partnering Strategy survey for individuals	**277** submitted surveys
Homelessness Partnering Strategy survey for organizations	**221** submitted surveys
Quick poll	**678** submitted responses
Electronic submissions	**22** submissions received

Homelessness Partnering Strategy online survey

The survey was open from July 17 until September 15, 2017.

Individual survey

- Respondents lived in all provinces, the Northwest Territories and Yukon; 23% lived in British Columbia, 28% in Alberta, 1% in Saskatchewan, 3% in Manitoba, 25% in Ontario, 8% in Quebec, 1% in Newfoundland and Labrador, 3% in New Brunswick, 2% in Nova Scotia, 1% in Prince Edward Island, 1% in Yukon, and 1% in the Northwest Territories.
- 81% of individual respondents lived in urban communities, 17% lived in rural communities and less than 1% lived in remote communities.
- 65% of individual respondents identified as female.
- 5% of individual respondents were aged 18 to 24, 24% were 25 to 34, 19% were 35 to 44, 24% were 45 to 54, 21% were 55 to 64 and 6% were 65 or more.
- Approximately 8% of individual respondents identified as First Nation, Inuit, or Métis.
- 11% of individual respondents identified as a visible minority.
- 14% of individual respondents identified as having a disability.
- 26% of individual respondents identified as homeless or having a previous experience of homelessness.

Organization survey

- Respondent organizations served most regions in the country; 20% served primarily British Columbia, 16% served primarily Alberta, 2% served primarily Saskatchewan, 3% served primarily Manitoba, 17% served primarily Ontario, 29% served primarily Quebec, 1% served primarily Newfoundland and Labrador, 5% served primarily New Brunswick, 4% served primarily Nova Scotia, 1% served primarily Yukon, 1% served primarily the Northwest Territories, and 2% identified as national organizations.
- 79% of organization respondents primarily served urban areas, 13% primarily served rural communities, and 3% primarily served remote communities.
- 15% of organization respondents were Homelessness Partnering Strategy Community Entities, 21% were service providers, 6% were Indigenous organizations, 42% were other non-profit/charitable organizations, and 10% were municipal/provincial/territorial government representatives.

Homelessness Partnering Strategy quick polls

- Two quick polls were online between July 17 and September 15, 2017:
  - In your opinion, to what extent is homelessness an issue in your community?
  - In your opinion, to what extent is homelessness an issue across Canada?
- 637 individuals responded to the poll about homelessness at the community level and 41 responded to the poll at the national level.
- 192 individuals responding to the community level poll also provided demographic information.

Community level poll

- Respondents who shared demographic information lived in Yukon and all provinces; the majority of these respondents were from British Columbia (21%), Alberta (27%), Ontario (26%) and Quebec (14%).
- 63% of these respondents identified as female.
- Respondents represented all age groups: 3% were aged 18 to 25, 13% were 25 to 34, 20% were 35 to 44, 35% were 45 to 54, 20% were 55 to 64 and 8% were 65 or older.